

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY UNITED STATES SENATE

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SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS

TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2005,

U.S. SENATE,,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY,,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m., in room SH-215, Hart Senate Office Building, Hon. Saxby Chambliss [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present or submitting a statement: Senators Chambliss, Harkin, Leahy, and Salazar.

STATEMENT OF HON. SAXBY CHAMBLISS, A U.S. SENATOR FROM GEORGIA, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing will now come to order. I welcome you all as we discuss the school nutrition programs.

Good nutrition is important for good health, and our school nutrition programs are a key component of our efforts to provide healthy, nutritious meals to our Nation's schoolchildren. According to the United States Department of Agriculture which administers these programs, over 1.5 billion school breakfasts and over 4.8 billion school lunches were served in 2004. Of these meals, over 82 percent of the breakfasts and over 59 percent of the lunches were served to children from low income families for which the overwhelming number of these meals were served as free. For some of these children, the school nutrition programs may be the healthiest, most balanced meals of their entire day.

We appreciate the efforts of our school nutrition professionals, many of whom are visiting with us today, for the job they perform to ensure that our young people have a healthy start on life. I will say that as the husband and a father of two school teachers, I hear constantly from my wife as well as my daughter about the positive reaction, the increased attention span, and the increased ability to learn from their children who are provided with breakfast each morning. It makes a huge difference, and to you folks who are involved in the school nutrition business, we can't tell you how much we appreciate the great work you do. We thank you for being here today and we look forward to this hearing this morning.

At this I'll turn to my friend and ranking Democratic member for any comment he would like to make. Senator Harkin.

STATEMENT OF HON. TOM HARKIN, A U.S. SENATOR FROM IOWA, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

Senator HARKIN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for calling this very important hearing. It's always a pleasure to be joined by our friends from the School Nutrition Association. I also want to welcome the Iowans here today, Virginia Bechtold, the president of the Iowa School Nutrition Association, Teresa Neese, and the rest of the Iowa delegates in town.

Last year this committee successfully reauthorized the Federal Child Nutrition programs with enormous bipartisan support. The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 not only improved the access of low income children to Federal child nutrition programs but also included provisions that I believe will dramatically improve how our kids eat at school.

Kids today face a minefield of nutritional risk. From the moment they get up in the morning till the time they go to bed at night they have dozens of opportunities to consume an unhealthy diet and far too few chances to eat healthy diets. It is no wonder that the Department of Agriculture found that scarcely any school-age children and adolescents meet all scientific recommendations for a sound diet. Even our public schools have been inundated by candy and soft drinks and snacks that are high in sugar and salt and fat. Too often, children don't have the time or opportunity for exercise and physical activity.

I just saw a figure just not too long ago, Mr. Chairman, that said that 80 percent of our elementary school kids in America today get less than 1 hour of physical activity a week in school.

The CHAIRMAN. How many hours of television?

Senator HARKIN. Exactly. We are not getting enough physical activity out there either.

We are making some progress. Last year's Child Nutrition bill included a provision under which schools will establish local school wellness policies. These wellness policies will include goals for nutrition education and physical activity, as well as nutritional guidelines for all of the food sold and made available on school grounds. The legislation gives local communities the authority to set the standards themselves according to local needs. In doing so are required to involve a diverse group of individuals including parents and students, school officials and the public.

Local school wellness policies represent an historic opportunity for our schools to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity among children and adolescents. I'm eager to hear from our witnesses today about their efforts to give kids healthier choices at school and to implement their local wellness policies. I thank our witnesses for their participation in this hearing today, and I also hope we will hear some comments on the free fruits and vegetables programs that are now in eight States and over 200 schools and growing very rapidly.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for calling this hearing and I see that one of our leaders in this area is our leadoff witness and we certainly welcome our colleague here today, too. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator. Our first witness is a former member of this committee and dear friend of mine, and a lady who has a keen interest in this particular issue. She's a great American and doing a terrific job of representing the State of North Carolina, my friend, Senator Dole. We welcome you; we look forward to your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ELIZABETH DOLE, A U.S. SENATOR
FROM NORTH CAROLINA**

Senator DOLE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin, good morning. Thank you so very much, Mr. Chairman, for convening this important hearing and for allowing me the opportunity to testify this morning.

Nutrition programs, a central mission of this committee, have always enjoyed a very special tradition of bipartisan support. This past year, working together, we crafted the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, which the President signed into law on June 30. We know that child nutrition and education are inextricably linked. It really is fairly simple, isn't it? When children are hungry, they don't learn. To compete effectively in the world market, the United States must have an educated workforce. To educate our children to their maximum potential, we must have strong and effective child nutrition programs if we expect each and every child to meet his or her full potential.

The President has continued his support for child nutrition as demonstrated by his budget proposal. A very lean budget but one that recognizes the importance of the child nutrition programs. I'm encouraged that the President's proposed budget does not involve program cuts or budget caps for child nutrition. The nutrition programs are an important component of this committee's jurisdiction, and I know that you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of the committee will work hard to ensure that the fundamental mission of these programs is not compromised.

I look forward to working with you on these challenges and I urge my colleagues on this committee to follow the President's lead and work to protect these child nutrition programs.

Let me also raise one area of particular interest and concern for me: the eligibility requirements for the school lunch and breakfast programs should be consistent with the WIC program. As we know, the school lunch and breakfast programs have three income categories, free, reduced, and paid meals. The children from families whose income is between 130 percent of poverty and 185 percent of poverty are eligible for reduced price meals. It is the smallest of the three categories. Unfortunately, State and local school boards have informed me that many parents are finding it difficult to pay the reduced price fee, and for some families the fee is an insurmountable barrier to participation.

There are a number of great individuals who work daily with these children who take money from their own pockets to help bridge this inequity. In fact many of them, Mr. Chairman, are here today in this hearing room representing the School Nutrition Association, and I thank them for all the hard work that they do on behalf of our children.

This is why I am a strong supporter of legislation to eliminate the reduced price fee and harmonize the school meal income eligibility guideline with WIC. If a family qualifies for free WIC benefits they should also qualify for free school meals. It just makes sense, and I fundamentally believe this is the right thing to do. For those youngsters who currently fall into the reduced price category, this will help make all the difference in the world; the difference between sitting in class hungry and malnourished or comfortable and attentive.

For a number of these children, particularly in today's fast food climate, the meals they are offered at school are by far, as you have said, Mr. Chairman, the best they have all day long. Last year's child nutrition legislation authorized a pilot program funded from discretionary dollars to eliminate the reduced price fee in up to five States. It is imperative that we begin to make headway on this initiative as a part of our national commitment to eliminating hunger and nutritional deficiencies among the children of this country.

I've written to Appropriations Chairman Cochran, Subcommittee Chairman Bennett, and ranking member Kohl asking for funds to initiate the pilot we authorized. I encourage the members of this committee to join me in this request. I've suggested an appropriation of \$29 million, but the exact amount will ultimately depend on which States are selected by the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Chairman, I applaud you for your leadership and your commitment to child nutrition; Senator Harkin also. In addition, let me also take this opportunity to thank you for your staunch defense of all sectors of agriculture across this country. I know our farm families in North Carolina are so pleased to have you at the helm of this committee, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you for the opportunity today to address my concerns.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Senator Dole can be found in the appendix on page 24.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Senator Dole, and just know that Senator Harkin and I both look forward to working with you as we explore the expansion of this pilot program, which obviously was a great idea, No. 1, and is something that is very much needed in our nutrition programs. I would encourage all of our folks to grab a handful of Georgia peanuts as they go back home because there's plenty of energy and nutrition in here. [Holds up a pocket of Georgia Peanuts]

Senator DOLE. There's also North Carolina peanuts too.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. We'll even share that with them. Thank you very much, Elizabeth.

For our second panel the committee calls forward represents of the School Nutrition Association. SNA is a national nonprofit professional organization representing more than 55,000 members, including over 7,000 in my State of Georgia who every day provide nearly 33 million high-quality, low-cost meals to students across the country. The association and its members are dedicated to feeding children safe and nutritious meals.

SNA members work in all aspects of the school nutrition field, from directing school district nutrition and food service depart-

ments, to conducting nutrition education, to managing individual school kitchens, and staffing school cafeterias and kitchens. SNA has a 59-year-history, having been founded the same year the National School Lunch Act passed in Congress, an act which incidentally is named for former Senator Richard B. Russell, who is certainly a legend in this institution and happens to be from my home State of Georgia, and who served on this committee from 1941 to 1946.

We are pleased this morning to introduce Karen Johnson, president of SNA, Ruth Jonen, the president-elect of SNA, Dora Rivas, chair of SNA's public policy and legislative committee, and Ms. Annette Bomar Hopgood, director of the school and community nutrition program of the Georgia Department of Education. Ladies, we're particularly pleased to have you here this morning. We thank you again for the great work you do and we look forward to your testimony this morning.

Ms. Johnson, we'll start with you.

STATEMENT OF KAREN JOHNSON, SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT, DIRECTOR OF CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS, YUMA, ARIZONA

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you. Chairman Chambliss, our congratulations to you on assuming the chairmanship of this committee. We look forward to continuing the special tradition between child nutrition and great State of Georgia. Senator Harkin, and all members of the committee, thank you for your leadership on the Child Nutrition and the WIC Reauthorization, and for continuing the tradition of this hearing.

I am Karen Johnson, president of the School Nutrition Association, formerly the American School Food Service Association, and I'm also the director of child nutrition programs in Yuma, Arizona. With me is Ruth Jonen, our president-elect, food service director from Palatine, Illinois; Dora Rivas, the chair of our public policy and legislative committee, and director of child nutrition in Dallas, Texas; and Annette Hopgood, the director of child nutrition for the State of Georgia. We are supported by a few hundred of our dedicated colleagues and our counsel, Marshall Matz.

As we meet here today, we are all aware of the difficult budget challenge that you face and that we face as Americans. The size of the Federal deficit and national debt is simply daunting and overwhelming. We are concerned about what it means for the economic health of the United States and for future generations.

Nevertheless, we are here on behalf of our most important resource, our children. We believe deeply that the child nutrition programs we administer are vital to the education of our children and their health and well-being. As we all know, hungry children do not learn. Without these important child nutrition programs, children are distracted in school and less receptive to the lessons being taught, students are more prone to illness, and school attendance suffers.

We therefore ask that these programs be exempt from any reconciliation or budget cap that Congress may enact. President Bush has held the child nutrition programs harmless in the drive to cut

the deficit and we believe that is the correct position for the country.

In 1981, the child nutrition programs were cut by approximately one-third and we lost 3 million children from the school lunch program. It took over 20 years before participation in the program rebounded to the pre-1981 level.

In 2005, the programs are struggling financially much more than they were in 1981. The Federal reimbursement rates are generally not adequate to cover the cost of the meal. The current Federal reimbursement rate for a free lunch is \$2.24 per meal with an additional 17 cents in USDA commodities. It is very challenging and often impossible to produce a nutritious meal for that amount of money. Even a small cut of 5 percent or 10 percent would have a dramatic effect on meal quality and student participation. Historically, we have found that for every one-cent increase in the price of a meal to children, schools lose 1 percent participation. We believe that any decrease in the Federal reimbursement rate at this time would have a much greater effect.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to mention in passing that it is the shortfall in the Federal reimbursement rate that has in great part led to the introduction and expansion of other food items through a la carte lines and vending operations. Research has demonstrated that students who choose school meals have better diets than children who do not. They consume more fruits, vegetables, milk, and have fewer overall calories from fat.

Last year in the reauthorization act, the Congress authorized a pilot program in up to five States to eliminate the reduced price meal program. Under the pilot, the free meal eligibility guideline would be increased from 130 percent to 185 percent of poverty, the same guidelines used in WIC to determine who is eligible for free WIC benefits. We urge funding for this important pilot.

Over 500 local and State school boards have endorsed the elimination of the reduced price programming. For too many families in the income category, the reduced price fee of 40 cents per meal per child for lunch and 30 cents for breakfast is simply too much money, and therefore, a barrier air to participation. The reduced price category is the smallest of the three income categories; approximately 9 percent of the children in the school lunch program are in the reduced category. Eliminating the reduced fee would extend the benefits of the school meal program to low income working households and we believe we should be tested through the pilot program.

The amount of money needed for the pilot would, of course, depend on the size of the States selected by USDA to participate. The department would not select the States until the money is appropriated. Senator Dole, the sponsor of this legislation proposing the elimination of the reduced price category, has suggested an appropriation of \$29 million. We support this amount.

The summer food service program is the most underutilized of the Federal nutrition programs. While almost 16 million children participate in the free or reduced price meal programs at school, only 2 million children are served during summer months. One of the biggest barriers to participation is the lack of approved spon-

sors. One of the major barriers to recruiting sponsors is the burdensome administrative requirements for the program.

Several years ago Chairman Lugar authored a provision calling for a pilot program to demonstrate the effects of simplified administration of the program. The 14-State pilot reduced paperwork by using the same method of program reimbursement used in the regular school meal program.

The pilot worked well and last year the pilot was made permanent and the number of States participating in the program was increased from 14 to 20. We would encourage the Congress to further increase the number of States until every State operates under the simplified procedures of the Lugar pilots.

Childhood obesity has captured the Nation's attention, as well it should. The statistics are frightening. Yet for all we're spending as a Nation on Federal nutrition programs and health care costs for diseases where obesity is a risk factor, we spend almost nothing on nutrition education and nutrition promotion. The reauthorization act authorized several initiatives in this area.

The first is teaching children to make healthy choices in the foods they eat and the importance of physical activity. The act authorizes a team nutrition network that would combine support for the team nutrition program with a program of grants to the States and local districts to deliver both team nutrition materials and programs developed by the States and local districts.

Children today are bombarded with messages about what they should eat. It is essential that children also receive balanced, positive messages to reinforce the health curriculum being taught in the classroom. Therefore, we urge the Congress to appropriate 50 cents per child per year for nutrition education and nutrition promotion. This modest amount of money would complement the investment being made in the nutrition programs by helping children learn to make healthy food choices and engage in physical activity.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin, members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony. Now I would like to turn to my fellow panel members and asked them to present their brief comments. Ruth Jonen, the SNA president-elect will focus on the new local wellness policy section of last year's reauthorization law, a section we are very excited about, and what we're doing to gear up to implement it. She will be followed by Dora Rivas, food service director from Dallas Independent School District in Texas, and then Annette Hopgood from the great State of Georgia.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Johnson can be found in the appendix on page 26.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Ms. Jonen.

STATEMENT OF RUTH JONEN, SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT-ELECT, DIRECTOR OF FOOD SERVICE, HOFFMAN ESTATES, PALATINE, ILLINOIS

Ms. JONEN. Good morning. Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin, members of the committee, thank you very much for this opportunity to add a few words about the local wellness policy section of last

year's reauthorization bill. We believe this section presents a great opportunity to improve the nutritional environment in our Nation's schools.

We wish to commend the committee for this new, imaginative, and important section of the law. As you know, Section 204 of the reauthorization will require each local educational agency that participates in Federal child nutrition programs, to establish a local wellness policy. The local policy shall include goals for nutrition education, physical activity, and nutrition guidelines for foods available on the school campus. The law is not prescriptive in dictating what the local goals shall be, only that the local education agency shall put it on their agendas and establish goals that best serve its community.

The School Nutrition Association believes this was a very creative approach to a very difficult challenge. This section also complements other parts of the legislation that seek to improve nutrition education and nutrition promotion. The new wellness initiative has already stimulated a lot of thought and discussion across the country and within our association. Internally, the School Nutrition Association has convened a task force that just met a couple of weeks ago here in Washington to develop a tool to assist local school districts draft their own wellness policy. The task force gathered data and sample policies from across the country and we'll be sharing those practices with other school districts. Our goal is to focus attention on wellness policies without being prescriptive.

A good example of establishing a partnership approach to the local wellness policy comes from Karen Johnson's own home State of Arizona. Championed by the State superintendent for education, Arizona has worked with a team of educators, school administrators, school food service directors, health professionals, and private industry to develop a model policy as a guide for schools in Arizona. The model has been piloted in eight schools and evaluated for both nutritional and financial impact. All schools realized at least the same amount of revenue from a la carte and vending sales. In fact some saw substantially greater income from these two revenue sources after implementing that policy.

Senator Harkin, I know you are particularly interested in school wellness policies so we did a little background research on how schools in Iowa are implementing the local wellness policies. Currently, schools across your State are beginning to establish their committees that will put together their local wellness policies. The Iowa School Nutrition Association is partnering with the Iowa Department of Education to do five workshops across the State to help school understand their responsibilities and the requirements under the law for local school wellness policies in last year's child nutrition bill. The Iowa Department of Education is also working with the Iowa Association of School Boards to form a task force that will draft a model policy for schools to use as a starting point for their own local wellness policies.

In general, as is the case across the country, a wide variety of stakeholders in Iowa are coming together to collaborate on the local wellness policies. We are excited by the energy and the enthusiasm that they are bringing to their task. Such a level of collaboration on school nutrition issues is unprecedented and it is, in my opinion,

vindication of the wisdom of this committee in putting the local wellness policies into the law.

In short, Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin, we look forward to working with educators, parents, students, community health professionals, and other interested parties to implement the law. We are excited by the opportunities presented by the local wellness policies and we believe they present an extraordinary opportunity to transform our children's eating habits at school. The larger goal, of course, is to promote student health and reduce childhood obesity. Thank you so much for including this section in the law.

Now I'll turn it over to Dora. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Jonen.

Ms. Rivas.

STATEMENT OF DORA RIVAS, CHAIR, SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSOCIATION PUBLIC POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE, DIRECTOR, FOOD AND CHILD NUTRITION SERVICES, DALLAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT, DALLAS, TEXAS

Ms. RIVAS. Thank you, Ruth.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin, and members of the committee, from a local perspective, one of the most important reforms we can have in the school nutrition programs is to eliminate the reduced price meal category. It is truly a barrier to participation in the program and access to a nutritious meal. Forty cents may not sound like a lot in Washington, but back home 40 cents for lunch per child per day and 30 cents for breakfast per child per day adds up, and it is a significant amount for low income children to pay. When one extends this to an average low income family of four who already qualifies for WIC, they just cannot afford even that.

In Dallas ISD, our current enrollment is approximately 158,000 students. Of those, 109,000 students, 69 percent of our enrollment, are eligible for free meals, and 14,200 students, 9 percent of our enrollment, are eligible for reduced price meals. What I see is a gap between those that are eligible and those who actually participate. What is interesting is that those who qualify for reduced price meals, only 14 percent participate in the breakfast program and only 75 percent of those participate in the lunch program.

Studies have shown the relationship between nutrition and learning. In my previous job as food service director with the Brownsville Independent School District in Brownsville, Texas under a special assistance, provision two, students things were offered free meals regardless of their ability to pay. When we initially went into the program about 10 years ago I received phone calls from reduced price category families indicating how appreciative they were not to worry about their children having a healthy meal at school. The 40 cents for lunch and 30 cents for breakfast was a true hardship for their families.

Mr. Chairman, I agree with your wife and daughter in their observations. What I have learned in observing students throughout the years is that students who are hungry are less attentive in the classroom and are more likely to perform poorly in school, and in many cases the school meal is the only nutritious meal they receive all day. I also learned that although it may be a parent's responsibility to provide for their family, when a child shows up in the cafe-

teria line and doesn't have money to pay for their meal, it is not their fault and they are still hungry.

In Dallas, I pointed out earlier that I see a gap between those that are eligible for reduced prices and those who actually participate in the program. Evidence of students not having money to pay for their meals is the over \$85,500 that is spent in Dallas each year to prepare cheese sandwiches and milk for those students who didn't have money to pay for their meals. As food service directors and cafeteria employees at schools, we cannot in good conscience let a student go without eating, and thus, we end up absorbing the cost of this food. This translates to lost revenue that is not being spent on meals being served to all students.

Also, on those days, the child is missing other very key nutrients that are important in their growth and development. We do not want any of our children to be left behind, especially the disadvantaged. The gap to access for a nutritious meal and improved student classroom performance for those disadvantaged students can be closed by eliminating the reduced price meal category. These students who qualify for reduced prices are the same students that qualify for benefits under the WIC program.

Thank you for your time and attention this morning. Childhood wellness is a big issue across the Nation. Providing adequate nutrition to our children should receive the highest legislative priority. Our biggest investment is their children. They are our future. Appropriating funds to provide all students with a healthy, safe meal at no cost in a nurturing environment should be our ultimate goal. Eliminating the reduced price meal, or at minimum, appropriating funds for the pilots to test this initiative is an important move forward.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Rivas.

Ms. Hopgood, a special welcome to you. We look forward to hearing from you.

**STATEMENT OF ANNETTE BOMAR HOPGOOD, DIRECTOR,
SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY NUTRITION PROGRAM, GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

Ms. HOPGOOD. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Harkin. We certainly appreciate being here today and want to congratulate you on your election to chair of this very important committee.

I guess I'm here today representing not only the Georgia Department of Education, but also other State agencies across the country who are responsible for implementing those statutes that originate here in this committee. Despite my youthful appearance, I am currently the most senior State agency director in the country, so I'm here to offer you my own and my department's assistance in your chairmanship as you go through this process of making important decisions about the school nutrition program. We especially appreciate your continuing the tradition here today of having this hearing. This is an opportunity for those of us who are practitioners to see you face-to-face, thank you for what you are doing for our program, and to let you know that we look to you for the leadership that we know that you will provide.

I bring greetings to you today from the State superintendent of schools, Kathy Cox, and she wanted me to remind you and share with you that she has a very strong opinion that school meals do in fact have a tremendous impact on and are an integral part of her efforts for Georgia to lead the Nation in improving student achievement. Over the last 4 weeks I have been able to meet with over 50 local school board members through the Georgia School Boards Association meeting at both Lake Blackshear and at Lake Lanier, where we discussed the relationship between health and academic achievement, and introduced the concept of the local wellness policies to these board members who are very excited about finding something within the school environment that they can control that will have positive impact on the health of children and their academic achievement. There are a lot of things that we cannot control that our children bring to school each day, but we can control the school environment, and they clearly understand that.

Down to my key point, however, it's just downright exciting to see Georgia peanuts again in this committee room. As you well know, there is a special and a long-standing tradition between Georgia and the child nutrition program and you alluded to this earlier. I constantly remind my colleagues across the country that it is the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act that we work diligently to implement across this country. Each time a Georgian, Senator Russell, Senator Talmadge, has chaired this committee, this distinguished committee, the school nutrition program has made historical advances. We look forward to your leadership and we have great expectations for your leadership.

Today, I am joined by a Georgia delegation numbering over 70. The CHAIRMAN. By far the best-looking group here.

Ms. HOPGOOD. I know. It's just a shame but that's just the way it is. About half of those with us today are industry partners who help us get the supplies and materials and the foods into our schools that we need to provide the services that we do. The 7,004 members of the Georgia School Food Service Association and my own staff at the department of education and Mrs. Cox are available to help you in any way that we possibly can in executing your leadership role.

We offer you the practical knowledge that we have gained by serving 1.1 million, or 74 percent of our children, lunches every day at school. That represents about 5 percent of all the lunches that are served across this country, which is very significant. We have one of the highest rates of student participation in the lunch program and the breakfast program in the country. We also serve 500,000 breakfasts and snacks every day. Systems such as Thomas County in south Georgia are finding creative ways to take breakfast into the classroom so that they can reach more children and can also extend the instructional time for our classroom teachers.

I'm just delighted to be here today and appear with the School Nutrition Association. I've been affiliated with the association since you don't what to know when. I'm also very delighted to be affiliated with their efforts on behalf of young people. I'll be happy to answer any questions today or in the future.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Hopgood can be found in the appendix on page 29.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks to each of you, again, very much for your work, and particularly thank you for being here today to help spread the good message about what's happening out there all across America with this program. It's pretty obvious that the President thinks an awful lot of the fact that we need to make sure that our children are eating well before they begin school each day. That's one reason in these very difficult budget times that we're in right now that he has seen fit not to ask us to achieve any savings in this program.

Ms. JOHNSON. Many of us can imagine that kids can sometimes be picky about what they eat. Having two myself, I know exactly what that's all about. Knowing that school meals must meet Federal guidelines for nutrition, specifically for the meals that you serve, how difficult is it for you to plan your menus with food that kids want to eat and that also meets those nutritional requirements?

Ms. JOHNSON. We're serving foods that children do want to eat. We're serving pizza with low fat cheese, perhaps more fiber in the crust. It's meeting the dietary guidelines. We have fresh fruit and vegetable bars. We have low fat milk. There's juice. I believe we are serving those foods that children want to eat.

The CHAIRMAN. I'm curious too about your summer program. Tell me again what percentage of folks it is you reach. I know some of our local programs where they're taking advantage of that, but the need for additional sponsors and the problem with getting additional sponsors, is a lot of that problem due to the Federal paperwork involved? If so, can you enlighten us a little bit on that please?

Ms. JOHNSON. Yes, it's another set of paperwork that's pretty detailed and is pretty burdensome to the program. I know in Arizona I was able to—and it's one of the States that I'm able to just go right into the summer program under the same paperwork that I've operated and the same rules and regulations that we run the regular program on. It's an easy transition. It doesn't put up a barrier to myself as a sponsor, or perhaps someone in the community that would like to be a sponsor. It's easy transition.

In some States it's not simplified paperwork and it is a barrier.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Rivas, I note that obviously commodities given to school systems by USDA plays an integral role in the diets that you provide for our children. Could you tell us a little bit about how that works from the standpoint of practical day-to-day operation? Has the amount of commodities given to the systems fluctuated over the last several years?

Ms. RIVAS. We can always use more commodities, particularly as difficult a time as we have making ends meet. The quality of commodities has been improving through the years. We have had simplified processes in being able to take commodities that our farmers produce and being able to produce them into products that are premanufactured that students will like. For example, taking whole turkeys and already having them processed into turkey roast or chicken nuggets, making them a lot more acceptable to our students.

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Hopgood, you mentioned what's happening in Thomas County, which happens to be adjoining to me. I know those folks down there and I know they run an awfully good school system. Is it a matter of thinking out-of-the-box or are these some ideas that have come out of various meetings like this that you've held around the State or around the country? Could you just enlighten us a little bit on that?

Ms. HOPGOOD. I feel sure that there are efforts around the country to do breakfast in the classroom, grab-and-go breakfast. In some of our schools we have close to 100 percent of the children that are in fact eating breakfast, just like they eat lunch, which is almost amazing. We serve about 55 percent of our free and reduced children at breakfast, but we also have one of the highest rates of paying children who eat breakfast at school, because parents see that as a convenience to them because they are both working and get up and out.

In the particular case of Thomas County, they have exceptional leadership. The school nutrition director there, Karen Green, whose husband happens to be the school superintendent—I say they sleep together and that's the reason she does so well in her position there.

[Laughter.]

Ms. HOPGOOD. She would be very disappointed if I didn't tell you that today. She worked very diligently with her school principals and her classroom teachers so that they could implement procedures that were very efficient and that moved that process on there. She has schools where they're serving not only economically needy children but they're reaching almost 100 percent of their student population at breakfast. We know there's no research stronger that shows the relationship between health and academic achievement than that related to breakfast and academic achievement. We have a lot of people—that's being done in north Georgia, it's being done in DeKalb County. It's been very successful where they have worked through the efficiency issues, the procedures locally.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Harkin.

Senator HARKIN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'm sorry, I'm going to have to leave. I have another committee, a Labor Committee I've got to go to, but I did want to hear the testimony and again to express my gratitude to all of you here in the School Food Service Association which is now called the School Nutrition Association, for all that you've done for so many years to get our kids a good healthy start in life. If it weren't for the school breakfast and the school lunch program, I can dare say what shape our country would be in today. The vision of a Richard Russell from Georgia and others who came before us have been fulfilled by all of you in this room and I thank you for that.

As you mentioned in your testimony, Ms. Johnson, Ms. Jonen, you too, we do have, by all accounts and by the findings of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we do have an obesity epidemic among our kids. We know that. It's there, and we can't sweep it under the rug.

We also know that diabetes is happening earlier and earlier in life. It's something that calls for pretty immediate action. I don't know that we can think about what we might do in the next decade

or two. We ought to be thinking in terms of what we do next year and the year after and the year after to starting changing our course of action in our schools. Kids learn at an early age what to eat and what to like. When they are bombarded by up to 40,000 TV ads before they ever start school about high sugar, high fat content foods, that's what they develop a liking for.

There were those, back when the school lunch program started who said this had no business in school. Schools were there to teach kids, educate them, not to feed them. We've gotten over that hurdle. It's like physical exercise. When I was a kid growing up, I bet you too, Mr. Chairman, we had recess and we had to go outside and do something. We had to. In Iowa about the only time you could stay indoors during recess or lunch period was if it was 20 below or something like that. Maybe you could stay inside.

Senator LEAHY. Not in Vermont.

Senator HARKIN. That's summer in Vermont. What the heck.

[Laughter.]

Senator HARKIN. We now know that we've got to address this in our schools, which leads me to this whole idea of nutrition and wellness. Now you mentioned the wellness policies and things were moving ahead. I was somewhat concerned that schools around the country should develop their own, but what are the guidelines? A lot of people just don't know. We don't have the ability to understand what these guidelines ought to be, so in last year's appropriation bill I put in funding that was supported on both sides of the aisle for the Institute of Medicine to do a study, and to provide some guidelines. They're not mandatory, but to provide a checklist, guidelines that were scientifically based for schools to follow. Now I hope that guideline will be done maybe in a year, year-and-a-half, or something like that. I hope in the meantime you proceed on, and that school districts proceed on in developing their own wellness policies. If some of them are not scientifically based, then they can modify them later on.

The second thing I wanted to just ask is that one of the areas of the testimony that the School Nutrition Association did not touch upon was the fruit and vegetable program. Again, this was something started in the 2002 Farm bill, started as a pilot project in four States. The idea was that a lot of kids they come to school—especially grade school kids, they come to school about 9:30 in the morning and they get the growlies. What happens? What do they start munching on? Or if you're in middle school and high school, it's always the vending machine. You can go out and get a nice high sugar drink, or you can get something that's high in sodium and that satisfies your growlies. The vending machines are there. I hope we're going to change our policy on those.

The idea was, what if you provided to kids in school free fresh fruits and vegetables. Not just in the lunch room—everywhere. Anywhere in the school. Not just you had to go to the lunch room at lunch time, but any time. We tested this theory out in four States, 100 schools, one Indian reservation. I can sit here today and tell you that not one of those schools, not one has asked to be taken off the program. In fact—I wouldn't say all. I don't know that figure, but most of them have asked, please keep us on it.

This year it's been expanded now to eight States and we're about 250 schools now in this country. I've visited some of those and you see these kids eating these fresh vegetables. They're eating things like fresh broccoli. I saw kids eating fresh spinach. They never had it before. Eating carrots, eating everything from apples and oranges to bananas. I had one teacher this weekend told me in Iowa about this—she said, I saw a sixth-grade kid in a new school, this is a new school that had been added on, picked up a banana and tried to eat the banana with the peel on it. Had never had a fresh banana; sixth-grade kid.

What I've found in these schools is these kids are eating these fresh fruits, kiwi fruits, oranges, apples, you name it, pineapple, and guess what, in the middle and high schools they're not putting money into vending machines. In the grade schools, the teachers say that kids are learning, they're calming down, they're studying better, they're happier kids. Again, it's been a very positive program and again I'm going to ask the Senate Appropriations Committee to add some more money for this.

I guess my question after all that is, does the School Nutrition Association support a further expansion of the fruit and vegetable program?

Ms. JOHNSON. Absolutely, Senator.

Ms. JONEN. Senator, it's almost as though you were a plant in our audience yesterday. We had so many of our School Nutrition Association colleagues who are in States who do not have the opportunity to participate in the fresh fruit and vegetable program who are saying, what about me. I'm in Illinois and I would say, what about me? We can maybe scoot across the river into Iowa and pick your pocket a bit. That's a wonderful program that has a great potential. It needs money. If you are so inclined, we would be most happy to expand that program to every State in the country.

Senator HARKIN. God bless you. It's about 35 cents, less than 35 cents per child. That's for two servings a day. That's a pretty good investment. I thank you for that, and I thank you for support of and I hope that we can keep this moving. I know we can't do it overnight. I understand it. If we can keep this momentum and keep more and more States coming in—Mississippi just came on-line last year and from everything I've heard it's just been a resounding success in Mississippi too. We just need to keep expanding it.

Thank you all very much.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I apologize I have to leave.

The CHAIRMAN. That's quite all right. Thank you for your keen attention, Senator Harkin, to this issue. I look forward to working hand in hand with you, as we always do on the Agriculture Committee in a bipartisan way, to make sure that we further promote the issues which we've talked about today. In addition to having a wife and a daughter who are teachers, I have a son-in-law in Georgia who's a vegetable farmer, so I'm particularly intrigued. He's in Georgia.

Senator HARKIN. Georgia is coming on board pretty soon.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Leahy.

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me brag about my grandchildren. I happen to have the pictures.

The CHAIRMAN. We will trade.

STATEMENT OF HON. PATRICK LEAHY, A U.S. SENATOR FROM VERMONT

Senator LEAHY. In the nutrition area, and I am not going to ask questions, I just want to make a short comment. Senator Cornyn and I are holding a hearing on joint legislation we have over in Judiciary.

I mention that because there are a whole lot of issues, no matter what you read in the paper, that transcend partisan politics. Nutrition is one of them.

Senator Dole was here earlier. She and her husband always had an interest in this. In fact, as many of you know, there have been a lot of pieces of Dole/Leahy and Leahy/Dole legislation over the years as there was before Dole/McGovern or McGovern/Dole. There still is.

Senator McGovern and Senator Dole were down at the White House about 5 years ago to talk about their plans for a school lunch program in Africa, something that would have tremendous help in many of these countries because you have not only boys going to school because they could get fed, but you have girls going to school and the societal changes that would come out of that.

I remember that, Mr. Chairman, because they were both standing there speaking at the podium, the seal of the President of the United States in front of it. President Clinton was waiting to speak after them. Bob Dole turns to him and he says, Mr. President, George and I are going to stay right here. You just stand back there. We like it with this seal.

It is when we work together is when we find what we can do. We are talking about the budget on the floor and I am given reason to pause at the comment by some in Congress about the intention to place the burden of heavy budget cuts on food assistance programs to the expense of low income families.

These are tough economic times. When people lose jobs and their incomes decline, programs like food stamps and school lunch end up, as you know, with increased participation. These programs do exactly what they were designed to do, support Americans in time of need of one of the most fundamental of life's necessities, food.

I want to make sure that when people are talking about making cuts to the program that they understand the typical food stamp recipient is a child, is a child. The food stamp program delivers more food assistance to children than all of the other Federal nutrition programs.

The school lunch program is also a crucial part of the food safety net. One of the hallmarks of this committee is to be a responsible steward of the food stamp and child nutrition program. Because of bipartisan cooperation and strong leadership, the food stamp error rate is the lowest in the program's history.

We streamlined administration of the program by eliminating food stamp coupons in favor of electronic benefit cards, which can only be used for food. Last year, working together, we reauthorized WIC and the school meals program. We strengthened the integrity while protecting the eligibility of low income children.

When you talk about getting savings from waste, fraud and abuse, it's not in those programs. We have worked hard together to ensure the dollar is spent on food assistance and not spent on waste.

A piece of legislation that I sponsored a number of years ago on the WIC program has saved the taxpayers over \$17 billion. \$17 billion. We make these programs work. There is unmet food needs in this country.

I worry very much about the wealthiest, most powerful nation on earth. One of the few—certainly about the only powerful nation that has the ability to feed itself and have billions of dollars worth of food left over for export. We spend billions of dollars on fad diets in this country. We spend billions of dollars in throwing away waste food. To have hunger in America is immoral. It is not a political issue. It is immoral. It violates every precept.

No matter what religion you might belong to, I guarantee you one of the precepts of the religion is to feed the hungry, and we should be doing that.

Senator Dole pointed out that for many children, the 40 cents required for a reduced price meal too often means they cannot afford to buy a school lunch. Now 40 cents does not seem like a lot to us, but for those children and their families, it can be a great hurdle.

I appreciate the comments of the School Nutrition Association regarding the need for expanding the Lugar Pilot to make it easier for sponsors to participate in the summer food service program. It helped children in my state of Vermont considerably.

For children who rely on eating at school during the academic year, summer vacation can be a long and stressful 3 months, and the summer feed programs would help a lot.

I am glad to see funds for nutrition education high on it on the School Nutrition Association agenda. Senator Lugar and Senator Harkin and I have been working for years to improve the nutritional quality of the food available to our children in school.

Some of these are efforts in progress, like reducing the unhealthy foods in schools and, as Senator Harkin was saying, the fresh fruits and vegetables. We have come a long way. We have a long way to go. When we are going to provide nutritious food, we ought to provide nutritious education. It is a good time to start it.

I met earlier this morning with members of the Vermont School Nutrition Association. I am always delighted when they come down here. They have been a great help to me and my staff, as had Marshall Matz, who is in the audience. They have helped a great deal.

We are in this together. It is our children we're talking about. My children are grown but I see the next generation in my grandchildren and my neighbor's children. I cannot help but think, and I come from a low income part of our state, I cannot help but think though, think about not just dollars and cents. Think of this as something that touches our morality and conscience as a nation.

We are blessed with so much. We are blessed with so much, how can we ever explain it to our conscience, to our maker, that we will leave hungry people in America. That is a shame and it is something we must always work and trying to stop.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having this hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Leahy.

You can see from the comments from all of us up here how much we appreciate the great work you do and how much respect we have for this program.

As we go through both the budget process as well as the appropriations process, we look forward to continuing a dialogue with the School Nutrition Association, and we think your input, your counsel and your advice.

Obviously, we are in very difficult times from a budget deficit perspective, but I am very pleased that the President did recognize how valuable these programs are. Hopefully we can continue down the road of providing additional funding for you.

The record is going to remain open for an additional 5 days for anyone who wishes to file a statement. Unless there is anything further, we are going to conclude this hearing.

Again, thank you, ladies, for being here. I thank all of you in the audience for the terrific work you do for the future of America, which is our children. God bless you.

[Whereupon, at 11:01 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MARCH 15, 2005

Senator Tom Harkin
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Opening Statement – Full Committee Discussion of School Nutrition
Programs
Tuesday, March 15, 2005
Senate Hart Office Building – Room 216

Thank you, Chairman Chambliss for calling this hearing. It's
always a pleasure to be joined by our friends from the School Nutrition
Association. I also want to welcome the Iowans in the audience today -
Virginia Bechtold, the President of the Iowa School Nutrition
Association, Teresa Nece, and the rest of the Iowa delegates in town.

Last year this committee successfully reauthorized federal child
nutrition programs with enormous bipartisan support. The Child
Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 not only improved the
access of low-income children to federal child nutrition programs, but
also included provisions that I believe will dramatically improve how
our kids eat while at school.

Kids today face a minefield of nutritional risks. From the moment they get up until they go to bed at night, they have dozens of opportunities to consume an unhealthy diet and far too few chances to eat healthy diets. It is no wonder the Department of Agriculture found that scarcely any school-age children and adolescents meet all scientific recommendations for a sound diet.

Even our public schools have been inundated by candy, soft drinks, and snacks high in sugar, salt, and fat. And too often, children don't have the time or opportunity for exercise and physical activity.

But we are making some progress. Last year's child nutrition bill included a provision under which schools will establish local "school wellness policies." These wellness policies will include goals for nutrition education and physical activity, as well as nutritional guidelines for all the foods sold and made available on school grounds.

The legislation gives local communities the authority to set the standards themselves, according to local needs, but in doing so are required to involve a diverse group of individuals, including parents, students, school officials and the public.

Local school wellness policies represent an historic opportunity for our schools to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity among children and adolescents. I am eager to hear from our witnesses today about their efforts to give kids healthier choices at school and to implement their local wellness policies. I thank our witnesses for their participation in this hearing today.

Before we begin, however, I do wish to point out that our successes in nutrition are in jeopardy. Both the House and Senate versions of the congressional budget resolution include instructions to the agriculture committees to cut funding under their jurisdiction that poses a very real risk to nutrition programs generally, and especially to the Food Stamp Program.

In fact, the Food Stamp Program is our nation's largest child nutrition program. Fifty percent of food stamp participants are children, and 80 percent of food stamp benefits go to families with children. This committee has a long tradition of bipartisan support for all of the federal nutrition programs, and I am hopeful that this tradition will continue in the 109th Congress. It's important to note that the error rate in the Food Stamp Program is now at an all-time low. I doubt that we can find savings in food stamp fraud and error that some have suggested.

**U.S. Senator Elizabeth Dole
Statement
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
March 15, 2005**

Mr. Chairman, thank you so very much for convening this important hearing and for allowing me the opportunity to testify. Nutrition programs, a central mission of this Committee, have always enjoyed a very special tradition of bipartisan support.

This past year, working together, we crafted the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, which the President signed into law on June 30th.

We know that child nutrition and education are inextricably linked. It really is fairly simple: When children are hungry they do not learn. To compete effectively in the world market, the United States must have an educated workforce, and to educate our children to their maximum potential we must have strong and effective child nutrition programs if we expect each and every child to meet his or her potential.

The President has continued his support for child nutrition as demonstrated by his budget proposal – a very lean budget but one that recognizes the importance of the child nutrition programs. I am encouraged that the President's proposed budget does not involve program cuts or budget caps for child nutrition. The nutrition programs are an important component of this Committee's jurisdiction, and I know that you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of this Committee will work hard to ensure that the fundamental mission of these programs is not compromised. I look forward to working with you on those challenges, and I urge my colleagues on this Committee to follow the President's lead and work to protect these child nutrition programs.

Let me also raise one area of particular interest and concern for me: The eligibility requirements for the School Lunch and Breakfast programs should be consistent with the WIC program. As we know, the School Lunch and Breakfast programs have three income categories: free, reduced and paid meals. The children from families whose income is between 130 percent of poverty and 185 percent of poverty are eligible for reduced price meals. It is the smallest of the three categories.

Unfortunately, many state and local school boards have informed me that many parents are finding it difficult to pay the reduced price fee, and for some families the fee is an insurmountable barrier to participation. There are a number of great individuals who work daily with these children...who take money from their own pockets to help bridge this inequity. In fact, many of them are here today in this hearing room representing the School Nutrition Association.

This is why I am a strong supporter of legislation to eliminate the reduced price fee and harmonize the school meal income eligibility guideline with WIC. If a family qualifies for free WIC benefits, they should also qualify for free school meals. It just makes sense, and I

fundamentally believe this is the right thing to do. For those individuals who currently fall into the reduced price category, this will help make all the difference in the world – the difference between sitting in class hungry and malnourished, or comfortable and attentive. For a number of these children, particularly in today's fast-food climate, the meals they are offered at school are by far the best they receive all day.

Last year's child nutrition legislation authorized a pilot program funded from discretionary dollars to eliminate the reduced price fee in up to 5 states. It is imperative that we begin to make headway on eliminating the reduced price category as a part of our national commitment to eliminating hunger and nutritional deficiencies among the children of this country.

I have written to Appropriations Chairman Cochran, Subcommittee Chairman Bennett and Ranking Member Kohl asking for funds to initiate the pilot we authorized. I encourage the members of this Committee to join me in this request. I have suggested an appropriation of \$29 million, but the exact amount will ultimately depend on which states are selected by the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. Chairman, I applaud you for your leadership and commitment to child nutrition. In addition, let me also take this opportunity to thank you for your staunch defense of all sectors of agriculture across this country. I know our farm families in North Carolina are so pleased to have you at the helm of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address these concerns.

**STATEMENT
OF THE
SCHOOL NUTRITION ASSOCIATION
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY
UNITED STATES SENATE
MARCH 15, 2005**

Chairman Chambliss, our congratulations to you on assuming the Chairmanship of this great Committee. We look forward to continuing the special tradition between child nutrition and the great state of Georgia. Chairman Cochran, thank you very much for your leadership on child nutrition and we wish you all the best as you move to Appropriations.....where we may still come and visit. Senator Harkin, and all members of the Committee, thank you for your leadership on the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization and for continuing the tradition of this hearing.

I am Karen Johnson, President of the School Nutrition Association, formerly the American School Food Service Association; I am also the Director of Child Nutrition in Yuma, Arizona. With me is Dora Rivas, the Chair of our Public Policy and Legislative Committee, and the Director of Child Nutrition in Dallas, Texas. We are supported by a few hundred of our dedicated colleagues, and our Counsel, Marshall Matz.

BUDGET RECONCILIATION

As we meet here today, we are all aware of the difficult budget challenge that you face and that we all face as Americans. The size of the federal deficit and the national debt is simply daunting and overwhelming. We are concerned about what it means for the economic health of the United States and for future generations.

Nonetheless, we are here on behalf of our most important resource, our children. We believe deeply that the child nutrition programs we administer are vital to the education of our children and their health and well-being. As we all know, hungry children do not learn. Without these important child nutrition programs children are distracted in school and less receptive to the lessons being taught. Students are more prone to illness and school attendance suffers.

We therefore ask that these programs be exempted from any reconciliation or budget cap that the Congress may enact. President Bush has held the child nutrition programs harmless in the drive to cut the deficit and we believe that is the correct position for the country.

In 1981, the child nutrition programs were cut by approximately one third and we lost three million children from the school lunch program. It took over twenty years before participation in the program rebounded to the pre-1981 level.

In 2005, the programs are struggling financially much more than they were in 1981. The federal reimbursement rates are generally not adequate to cover the cost of the meal. The current federal reimbursement rate for a "free" lunch is \$2.25 per meal with an additional 17 cents in USDA commodities. It is very challenging, and often impossible, to produce a balanced nutritious meal for that amount of money. Even a small cut of 5% or 10% would have a dramatic effect on meal quality and student participation. Historically, we found that for every 1 cent increase in the price of the meal to students, schools lost 1% participation. We believe that any decrease in the federal reimbursement rate at this time would have a much greater effect.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to mention in passing, that it is the shortfall in the federal reimbursement rate that has, in great part, led to the introduction and expansion of other food items through a la carte lines and vending operations. Research has demonstrated that students who choose school meals have better diets than children who don't. They consume more fruits, vegetables and milk, and have fewer overall calories from fat.

ELIMINATION OF REDUCED PRICE MEALS

Last year in the Reauthorization Act, the Congress authorized a pilot program in up to five states, to eliminate the reduced price meal program. Under the pilot, the free meal eligibility guideline would be increased from 130% to 185% of poverty, the same guideline used in the WIC to determine who is eligible for free WIC benefits. We urge funding for this important pilot.

Over five hundred local and state school boards have endorsed the elimination of the reduced price program. For too many families in this income category, the reduced price fee of 40 cents per meal per child for lunch and 30 cents for breakfast is simply too much money and therefore a barrier to participation. The reduced price category is the smallest of the three income categories; approximately 9% of the children in the school lunch program are in the reduced category. Eliminating the reduced fee would extend the benefits of the school meal program to low income working households and, we believe, should be tested through the pilot program.

The amount of money needed for the pilot would, of course, depend on the size of the states selected by USDA to participate. The Department will not select the states until money is appropriated. Senator Dole, the sponsor of the legislation proposing the elimination of the reduced price category, has suggested an appropriation of \$29 million. We support this amount.

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE

The Summer Food Service Program is the most underutilized of the federal nutrition programs. While almost 16 million children participate in the free or reduced price meal programs at school, only 2 million children are served during the summer months. One of the biggest barriers to participation is the lack of approved sponsors. One of the major barriers to recruiting sponsors is the burdensome administrative requirements for the program.

Several years ago Chairman Lugar authored a provision calling for a pilot program to demonstrate the effect of simplified administration of the program. The fourteen state pilot reduced paperwork by using the same method of program reimbursement used in the regular school meal program.

The pilot worked well and last year the pilot was made permanent and the number of states participating in the program was increased from fourteen to twenty. We would encourage the Congress to further increase the number of States until every state operates under the simplified procedures of the "Lugar pilots".

NUTRITION EDUCATION AND PROMOTION

Childhood obesity has captured the nation's attention, as well it should. The statistics are frightening. Yet, for all we are spending as a nation on federal nutrition programs and health care costs for diseases where obesity is risk factor, we spend almost nothing on nutrition education and nutrition promotion. The Reauthorization Act authorized several initiatives in this area.

The first is teaching children to make healthy choices in the foods they eat and the importance of physical activity. The Act authorizes a Team Nutrition Network that would combine support for the Team Nutrition Program with a program of grants to the states and local districts to deliver both Team Nutrition materials and programs developed by the states and local districts.

Children today are bombarded with many messages about what they should eat. It is essential that children also receive balanced, positive messages to reinforce the health curriculum being taught in the classroom. Therefore, we urge the Congress to appropriate 50 cents per child per year for nutrition education and nutrition promotion. This modest amount of money would complement the investment being made in the nutrition programs by helping children learn to make healthy food choices and engage in physical activity.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin and all members of the committee thank you again for the opportunity to present this testimony. We would all be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.


School Nutrition Program

Kathy Cox, State Superintendent of Schools

STATEMENT OF ANNETTE BOMAR HOPGOOD
 DIRECTOR, SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM
 GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
 BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY
 COMMITTEE
 SENATOR SAXBY CHAMBLISS, CHAIR

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We certainly appreciate being here today and want to congratulate you on your election to chair this very important committee.

I am here today representing not only the Georgia Department of Education but also other State agencies across the country who are responsible for implementing those statutes that originate here in this committee. Despite my youthful appearance, I am currently the most senior State agency director in the country, so I am here to offer you my own and my department's assistance in your chairmanship as you go through this process of making important decisions about the school nutrition program. We especially appreciate your continuing the tradition here today of having this hearing. This is an opportunity for those of us who are practitioners to see you face-to-face, thank you for what you are doing for our program and to let you know that we look to you for the leadership that we know that you will provide.

I bring greetings to you today from Georgia's Superintendent of Schools, Kathy Cox. She asked me to share with you her strong opinion that school meals have a tremendous impact on and are an integral part of her efforts for Georgia to lead the nation in improving student achievement. Over the last four weeks I have been able to meet with over 50 local school board members through the Georgia School Boards Association meetings at both Lake Blackshear and at Lake Lanier, where we discussed the relationship between health and academic achievement, and introduced the concept of the local wellness policies to these board members who are very excited about finding something within the school environment that they can control that will have positive impact on the health of children and their academic achievement. There are a lot of things that our children bring to school each day that cannot be controlled by the school or its leaders, but educators and policy makers can control the school environment. Clearly local school board members understand this.

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 March 15, 2005
 Congressional Hearing
 U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee

Down to my key point, however, it's just downright exciting to see Georgia peanuts again in this committee room. As you well know, there is a special and a long-standing tradition between Georgia and the child nutrition program and you alluded to this earlier. I constantly remind my colleagues across the country that it is the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act that we work diligently to implement across this country. Each time a Georgian - Senator Russell and Senator Talmadge - has chaired this committee, this distinguished committee, the school nutrition program has made historical advances. So we look forward to your leadership and we have great expectations for your leadership.

Today, I am joined by a Georgia delegation numbering over 70 - about half of those with us today are industry partners who help us get the supplies and materials and the foods we need into our schools so we can provide meals. The 7004 members of the Georgia School Food Service Association and my own staff at the Georgia Department of Education and Superintendent Cox are available to help you in any way that we possible can in executing your leadership role. We offer you the practical knowledge that we have gained by serving 1.1 million, or 74 percent of our children, lunches every day at school. That represents about 5 percent of all the lunches that are served across this country, which is very significant. We have on of the highest rates of student participation in the lunch program and the breakfast program in the country. We also serve one-half of one million breakfasts and snacks each day. School systems such as Thomas County in south Georgia are finding creative ways to take breakfast into the classroom so that they can reach more children and can also extend the instructional time for our classroom teachers.

I am just delighted to be here today and testify with the School Nutrition Association. I have been affiliated with the association since 1976. I am delighted to be affiliated with their efforts on behalf of young people and their education. I will be happy to answer any questions today or in the future.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the opportunity afforded me here today.

cc. Kathy Cox, Superintendent of Schools
 State of Georgia

